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ABSTRACT

The theoretical explication of the meaning of relationships in women's lives by researchers at the Stone Center for Developmental Services at Wellesley College brings a rich dimension to the topic of women mentoring women. Rather than trying to understand the development of a "separate self," the Stone Center group has been exploring the development of the "self-in-relation." The concept of relational empowerment, or mutual empowerment, refers more to a "power with" model. From the perspective of the self-in-relation model of development, it is fairly obvious that the psychosocial functions such as role modeling, acceptance and confirmation, counseling, and friendship will carry more import for many women than will the career functions of sponsorship, coaching, protecting, or making the protege known to others. The self-in-relation theory would suggest that the quality of the same-sex mentor dyad for women has the potential for being more mutual in power and provide a fuller range of empathy due to women's developmental experiences. Women's ways of being are often devalued, leaving them somewhat inhibited and feeling inadequate on the job. Limitations to female dyads include that they are still difficult to find; relational aspects of mentoring are not always what gets people ahead in organizations; and people may be affected by underlying expectations of a female authority figure. (ABL)

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MENTORING FROM A SELF-IN-RELATION PERSPECTIVE

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Presentation for Symposium on "Women Mentoring Women: New Theoretical Perspectives & Their Application
Natalie S. Eldridge and Lucia A. Gilbert, Co-Chairs

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The lens I will be using today to focus upon the mentoring process is the work of the researchers at the Stone Center for Developmental Services and Studies at Wellesley College. Their theoretical explication of the meaning of relationships in women's lives brings a rich dimension to the topic of women mentoring women. In this presentation, then, I will begin with a summary of pertinent aspects of Stone Center theory. Then I will suggest how this perspective can help us to understand some specific aspects of the woman to woman mentoring dyad. I will end by describing some potential limitations to the process of women mentoring women.

Self-in-Relation Theory

The core of the theoretical work of the Stone Center has emerged from the exploration and dialogues of five women, trained as clinicians, who are engaged in a mutual process of envisioning and articulating a theory of women's psychological development. Though

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trained in traditional theoretical orientations to human development, these theorists are drawing from the experiences of women to establish the basic assumptions and themes in women's lives. More specifically, they are drawing on their relationships with one another, with their clients, and with the broader literature on the psychology of women. Their thoughts are presented in a series of brief essays they refer to as "Working Papers," a name which reflects the process orientation of their efforts.

A major theme articulated in these Working Papers is the importance of a sense of relatedness for women. As Jean Baker Miller (1986) writes: "We observe that women tend to find satisfaction, pleasure, effectiveness and a sense of worth if they experience their life activities as arising from, and leading back into, a sense of connection with others." Using this theme as a central organizing principle for the development of a sense of self in women, their theory differs markedly from more traditional developmental theories which use a theme of separation and individuation as a central organizing theme. Rather than trying to understand the development of a "separate self," the Stone Center group has been exploring the development of the "self-in-relation." By looking only at women's lives, this concept of self-in-relation has come into a clear focus. Yet their theoretical work may be broadening the understanding of men's development as well. The theme of relatedness is present in all human experience, but is given a secondary status by perspectives which focus on the process of separation and individuation as primary in the development of the self.

Mutuality

The process of development predominant for women, from the perspective of the self-in-relation theory, is a form of development within relationships. More specifically, for growth to occur, certain kinds of relationships are proposed: those in which everyone interacts in ways that foster the psychological development of all the people involved. This concept of mutual psychological development is key. Judy Jordan (Surrey, Kaplan, & Jordan,1990) suggests that, rather than entering relationships as a means to develop the self, people engage in relationships to contribute to the growth of something which is greater than the individual self: the relationship. Janet Surrey (1987) suggests that the goal of development is the increasing ability to build and enlarge mutually enhancing relationships. Mutuality in relationships is defined to include mutual engagement or attention, mutual empathy, and mutual empowerment.

Relationships are not always places where we can grow, however. Given the premise that women's sense of self develops within relationship, the quality of the relationships which a woman is invested in will have a huge impact upon her growth or her lack of growth. The Stone Center theorists refer to the non-growth aspects of relationships as "disconnections" and "violations." Disconnections occur when one is prevented from engaging in mutually responsive and mutually enhancing relationships. Violations occur when more aggressive action is taken to inhibit the natural process of mutual connection: actions like verbal humiliation, physical abuse, or incest.

Empowerment

The Stone Center theorists have articulated a model of power that is not a "power over," or an active-passive dichotomy. Their concept of relational empowerment, or mutual empowerment, refers more to a "power with" model. "Relational empowerment refers to the process of enlarged vision and energy stimulated through interaction, in a framework of emotional connection" (Surrey, 1987). Thus, both parties in a relationship are empowered to act through the process of their connection to one another.

Authenticity

The final concept from the Stone Center I wish to briefly mention is the concept of authenticity in relationships. This refers to a sense of being whole, or wholely oneself, in relation to another person. When a person is being authentic, they feel free to think, act and feel whatever emerges. Inauthentic behavior arises from the process of hiding a part of oneself, or putting on a mask.

Applications to Mentoring

Having provided a very brief glimpse of some key concepts in the Stone Center theory, I would like to use this theory to develop three points in our discussion of women mentoring women. The first point, already mentioned in the review by Lucia Gilbert, involves the emphasis women proteges place on the relational aspects of mentoring. Kathy Kram (1988) has categorized the functions of mentoring into two broad areas: the psychosocial functions and the career functions. She describes the psychosocial functions as depending more on the quality of the interpersonal relationship and the emotional bond that underlies the relationship. She describes the

career functions as depending more on the senior person's position and influence in the organization. "Career functions affect the individual's relationship to the organization while psychosocial functions affect the individual's relationship with self and with significant others both within and outside the organization" (Kram, p. 32). From the perspective of the self-in-relation model of development, it is fairly obvious that the psychosocial functions such as role modeling, acceptance and confirmation, counseling, and friendship will carry more import for many women than will the career functions of sponsorship, coaching, protecting, or making the protege known to others. Indeed, women have reported that the relational aspects of mentoring (i.e.; "being in a relationship with" the mentor) are more important to them than men reported (Gilbert & Evans, 1985). This does not mean that the career functions are not important also. Rather I would suggest that women may tend to be more concerned about the quality of the relational context of a mentoring relationship than in the level of career functions which can be offered. In other words, all thing being equal, a woman might choose to move toward the relational aspects of a mentor with less regard for the position power of that mentor. From an instrumental perspective, this could be viewed as a case of not reaching for the greatest opportunity. Yet it can also be viewed as an affirmation and recognition of the basic relational context that is essential for the growth and development of the "self-in-relation."

I am not suggesting that women's overall needs in a mentoring relationship are different from men's. Kram's (1988) description of the true mentoring relationship as being a mutually enhancing one

which encompasses the full range of psychosocial and career functions seems applicable to both men's and women's experiences. Rather, I am suggesting that if you begin with women's experience of developing a sense of self in the context of relationships, and look through this lens at the process of career or professional development, the dimensions of mentoring you see are affected.

This brings me to my second point. I believe that gender has an impact upon how we enter mentoring relationships, our experience of the relationship itself, and on the ultimate consequences of these relationships. For example, let's look at the first dimension of "entering a mentoring relationship." In the process of moving toward and engaging in a mentoring relationship, women proteges may pay more attention to the psychosocial functions the relationship may provide, as I have already suggested. More specifically, we may look for mentors who can be role models in how to balance authentic relational priorities with the more instrumental demands of the workplace. For example, how does one balance a natural empathy for the needs of one's graduate students with the reality of the demands to publish or perish?

How might gender have an impact on the second dimension, "our experience of the relationship itself?" The self-in-relation theory would suggest that the quality of the same-sex mentor dyad for women has the potential for being more mutual in power and provide a fuller range of empathy due to women's developmental experiences. The environmental or organizational context may press the senior woman to exert "power over" behaviors in the mentoring process. Still, the intrapsychic organization of the two women in the

dyad provide a greater chance for mutually empathic and mutually empowering dynamics to emerge and be maintained.

Let's turn attention for a moment to the other side of the mentoring relationship: how it ends. How might gender influence the "outcomes" or goals of the mentoring process? Kram (1988) talks about four stages of a mentoring relationship: Initiation, Cultivation, Separation, and Redefinition. She suggests that, after a period of physical and psychological separation, the relationship either ends or takes on significantly different characteristics, making it more a peerlike friendship. Of the eighteen mentor pairs which formed the primary sample for her study, only one was a female-female mentor pair. If we looked at a sample where the pairs were predominantly female same-sex pairs, would the separation and redefinition phases have been described in the same ways? Stone Center theory suggests that women are generally trained in the maintenance of relationships, and have greater opportunity and support for developing the skills to grow, change, and redefine one's sense of self within relationships. I would suggest that, in woman to woman mentoring dyads, the separation phase may not emerge as clearly, and that the redefinition phase might be more complex and broad. There is not adequate research done to date to test this hypothesis. In another population of woman-woman dyads, the population of lesbian couples, the literature has noted the frequency of relationships that have been maintained beyond the duration of the "lover" or "partner" stage and redefined as "friend." This may be environmental to some degree, due to the small and often tight-knit nature of this hidden minority group. (Women in some occupations

share this condition of being a distinct minority.) However, several theorists have interpreted this phenomena to be a reflection of women's socialization: that two women are more likely than two men, or a man and a woman, to mutually value and find a way to maintain a redefined relationship. I think that the Self-in-Relation theory underscores this influence of women's socialization in our valuing of relationship quality and process. Therefore, I would suggest that, in an analogous way, two women in a mentoring dyad are more likely than two men, or a man and a woman, to mutually value and find a way to maintain a redefined relationship.

Empowerment and Authenticity

The final point I wish to make involves the role and power of authenticity in mentoring relationships. Stone Center theory posits that being authentic, or wholey oneself, is possible in mutually enhancing relationships or in environments that do not demand that we limit ourselves. Relationships at work are imbedded in an organizational context which includes the nature of the tasks we must perform, the systems to reward us for our work, and the organizational culture (Kram, 1988). Irene Stiver (1983) suggests that often, organizational contexts prevent authenticity in women in the workplace. This can create disconnections or violations to a woman's sense of self-in-relation. Women's ways of being are often devalued, leaving us somewhat inhibited and feeling inadequate on the job. One example of this is the impact of a woman's tears in the workplace.

When women's ways of being are devalued in the workplace, the importance to women of mutually empowering and enhancing

relationships in the work arena is increased. It is in the context of these developmental relationships, with peers or with mentors, that women can feel authentic and whole. This reality tends to reinforce the primacy of the relational aspects of mentoring dyads for women.

Limitations for Women Mentoring Women

In this presentation I have focused on the positive, enhancing elements of the female-female mentoring dyad. However, lest someone in the audience think that the answer to women's alienation in the workplace is finding a female mentor, let me mention a few limitations to these dyads as well. I will mention just three.

First, female mentors are still difficult to find in many situations. Anita Gram will address the role of peer relationships in such settings. Furthermore, potential female mentors may have a great deal of pressure on them, due to their minority status at their level in the organization. This pressure may serve to further limit their availability to female proteges, or their freedom to be authentic within such relationships.

A second drawback to the elements of relationship I have been highlighting is that the relational aspects of mentoring are not always what get us ahead in an organization. Women have often been ghettoized into relationship-maintaining roles within organizations; roles that are not mutually enhancing and do not lead to career rewards for these women.

Finally, we are affected by our underlying expectations of a female authority figure. For some of us, an unconscious wish for an all encompassing mother may limit the development of a mutual and

authentic relationship, leading instead to a string of disappointments and frustration. Kay Long will expand further on the unconscious dimensions which can affect relationships with female mentors.

Conclusion

In summary, I have attempted to illustrate how the self-in-relation theory provides a useful perspective from which to view and understand the phenomenon of women mentoring women. I have discussed the importance to women, both as mentors and as proteges, of the relational or psychosocial aspects of the mentoring process. I have suggested how gender may influence the development and quality of mentoring relationships among women. And finally, I have highlighted the importance of mutuality and authenticity in these relationships. Let me leave you with the thought that the presence of mutually enhancing relationships for women in the workplace can change not only the visions of the individual women within these relationships, but can build the basis for a community revisioning of the environments of entire organizations.

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